

SELFRIDGE FIELD, BUILDINGS NOS. 246 and 253
(Double NCO Quarters)
(Family Housing)
246 Birch St. and 253 Wagner St.
Mt. Clemens vicinity
Macomb County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-116-J

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
Great Lakes Systems Office
Department of the Interior
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, NE 68102-2571

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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SELFRIDGE FIELD, HAER No. MI-116-J
BUILDINGS #246 and 253
(DOUBLE NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS QUARTERS)
(Family Housing)

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: 246 Birch Street and 253 Wagner Street
Selfridge Air National Guard Base
Mt. Clemens vic., Macomb Co., Michigan

Quad/UTM: U.S.G.S. Mount Clemens East Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.350880.4718960
(246 Birch)
17.350920.4718960 (253 Wagner)

Date of Construction: 1932

Present Owner: Air National Guard
3500 Fetchet Avenue
Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland 20762

Present Use: Residential

Significance: These buildings are representative of the Georgian Revival architecture present through the cantonment area, with simple porches and restrained details such as corbelling, window hoods and returns. All were built from standardized plans and all played a central role in the lives of non-commissioned personnel stationed at the base. They also are excellent examples of the architectural expression that defined the character of the Cantonment area of the base, a style flourishing in the United States at the nation's Sesquicentennial and inspired by Rockefeller's Williamsburg re-creation.

The architectural and functional "core" of Selfridge, the original base, constructed prior to World War II, presents a virtually unique resource in Michigan. Few airfields that were exclusively military in genesis were built in the state and Selfridge is the oldest and best preserved example of its type. The concentration of brick structures built in the cantonment area of the base from the mid-1920s into the early 1930s form a cohesive assemblage.

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Historian:

William E. Rutter, Midwest Environmental Consultants,
May, 1996

II. HISTORY

Buildings #246 and #253, are identical "Double Non-Commissioned Officers Quarters"¹ erected in January, 1932 at #246 Birch and #253 Wagner Streets, with 2,980 square feet at a cost of \$13,300 from plans provided by the Construction Services Office of the Quartermaster General at a cost of \$13,300.² The A.M. Kutsche and Company, Builders, of Detroit, erected them.³ In 1993 the roofs were replaced with fireproof polymer shingle molded to resemble slate.⁴ All continue to serve as base housing today.

This residential building type represents one of the six distinct yet complementary varieties of non-commissioned officer's residential housing erected during the base permanent construction program initiated during the late 1920s and early 1930s. This residential core of the Cantonment District housed non-commissioned officers, a purpose it continues to serve today.

¹Original construction plans and elevations on file Selfridge Base Civil Engineering

²Mihalak, Joseph, Evolution of Family Housing Selfridge Air National Guard Base Mount Clemens, Michigan, p.12.

³Photograph on file, historic photograph file, Selfridge Base Museum.

⁴Interview, Vechel Olson, Head of Operations and Maintenance, Selfridge Civil Engineering, April 30, 1996.

The Cantonment district is unified by its historical frame of reference, with all buildings being built within a 7 year period between 1927 and 1934.⁵ These buildings replaced the frame, temporary buildings that were the hallmark of the original Selfridge Field, dating to ca. 1917 to 1918. Stylistically, all are substantial architect-designed buildings executed in a brick medium. All but the most functional structures display strong references to the Georgian Revival style in massing and in elements such as arched windows, quoins, and classical pediments.

This complex of buildings was built at the core of the original Selfridge Air National Guard Base and today is still the most distinctive cluster of architecture on base. The brick structures present today form a consistent entity of Georgian Revival architecture in the residential housing and duplexes (#220s to #250s series), and the administrative and support facilities (#300 to #350 and #3 to #199 series). It includes hangars, officers housing, barracks, squadron operations/control tower, specialized buildings such as the fire station, a parachute house and other maintenance and support facilities.

Buildings in the Cantonment area played a significant part in Selfridge's role as

⁵Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, p. x.

a training base during the war. The base expanded outward spatially and the number of base structures mushroomed rapidly during the war. Although most of the new buildings were constructed in the base's newly acquired zones, a number were erected in proximity to the Cantonment core. Still, the Cantonment District provided a structural, functional, and stylistic anchor for the base.

III. DESCRIPTION

Although there are a total of 19 houses comprising the National Guard-administered brick Cantonment residential district, the total number of house types executed is six, with four sharing identical floor plans. All designs are very similar, with distinct and obvious references to Georgian Revival style. All are studiously symmetrical, all are executed in brick. All of these houses are rectangular plan, two story duplexes, with side gabled or hipped roofs. They display symmetrical four bay facades, all originally featuring paired center entry doors for the constituent duplexes, although several have been converted to side entry duplexes. All have projecting entry vestibules and rear porches and some possess side elevation sun porches. Although all residential housing is standard in plan, slight differences in porches, trim and window treatment offer

some variation among the assemblage.

Buildings #246 and #253 display explicitly symmetrical elevations executed in common bond brick. They are two story, hipped roof, rectangular 42 foot wide by 30 foot deep dwellings resting on a concrete foundation and distinguished by frame 10 foot 6 inch wide by 17 foot 2 inch deep sun porches on the side elevations. All fenestration is defined with concrete sill and double course gauged brick bond lintels and the roof line is broken by integrated chimneys at the midpoint of the side elevations. The facade of the brick house is four bays wide, defined in the first story by projecting flat roofed brick entry vestibules 8 feet wide and 5 feet deep that are flanked by paired sash windows and in the second floor by four evenly spaced sash windows. The entry doors in the vestibule are enframed in classical pilasters that rise to an entablature surmounted by a wood fascia and is further distinguished by a transom window with tracery.

The facade is extended on the side elevations by frame, 10 feet 3 inch wide by 17 foot 2 inch deep sun porches. These flat-roofed porches repeat the classical details in enframing corner pilasters and entablature that distinguish the band of three sash windows above a clapboard apron on the facade and rear

elevations and rank of five sash windows on the side elevations. The side elevations are identical and are composed of the sun porch that is flanked to the rear by a sash window on the main building. Two sash windows define the second story bays, occurring above the sun porch and sash window. The side hips of the house are broken by engaged chimneys. The rear elevation nearly duplicates the piercing pattern of the facade. It four bays are defined by a central open rear entry porch composed of unadorned center and corner pillars that support a frieze shielding entry doors and adjacent small sash windows. These are flanked by sash windows on the first story, while the second story duplicates the four sash windows of the facade.

The floor plan of these buildings is identical. Upon leaving the entry vestibule through a wood nine-lighted door on the first floor one faces a stair leading up to the second floor or turns into the living room with a corner fireplace. The stair baluster and newel post are simple and generic. To the rear are located the dining room with a simple central ceiling fixture and kitchen, which has been renovated and displays modern vintage wood or metal cabinets and vinyl flooring. The sun porch is located peripheral to the living room and is accessed through French doors. Ascending the stairs to a landing one proceeds either directly a bedroom, turns into a second bedroom, or follows a short hall way

to the third bedroom, which is situated next to a bathroom at front of the house. The bedrooms feature wall closets with replacement plain metal or wood louvered track doors, while the bathroom has been renovated with recent vintage ceramic tile walls and floor. The house basement contains a boiler room and coal bin. Floors are oak, walls are plaster on masonry and display a cornice molding and an 8 inch baseboard with concave cap molding. Window and door trim is 4 1/2" wide unornamented faceboard. Glazed brick is placed in front of the fireplace and two brass wall sconces are placed in the overmantle. Radiator hot water heat and electric base board heat is used in the house.

IV . BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

Anonymous, Brief History of Selfridge Air Force Base, 1917-1960, unpublished ms., Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1960.

Mihalak, Joseph, Evolution of Family Housing Selfridge Air National Guard Base Mount Clemens, Michigan, Historical Office, U.S. Army Tank-Automotive Command, 20, January, 1988.

Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, unpublished ms., Public Information Office, Selfridge ANG Base, Michigan, 1977.

B. PLANS

Original plans on file, "Double Noncommissioned Officers Quarters," Construction Division Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, D.C., on file Selfridge Base Civil Engineering.

C. INTERVIEWS

Vechel Olson, Head of Operations and Maintenance, Selfridge Base Civil Engineering, April 30, 1996

Eric Reeve, Selfridge Environmental Management, October 12, 1995.
Colonel Robert Stone (Ret.), Curator, Selfridge Base Museum, October 13, 1995.